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Weingartner, Felix
On conducting

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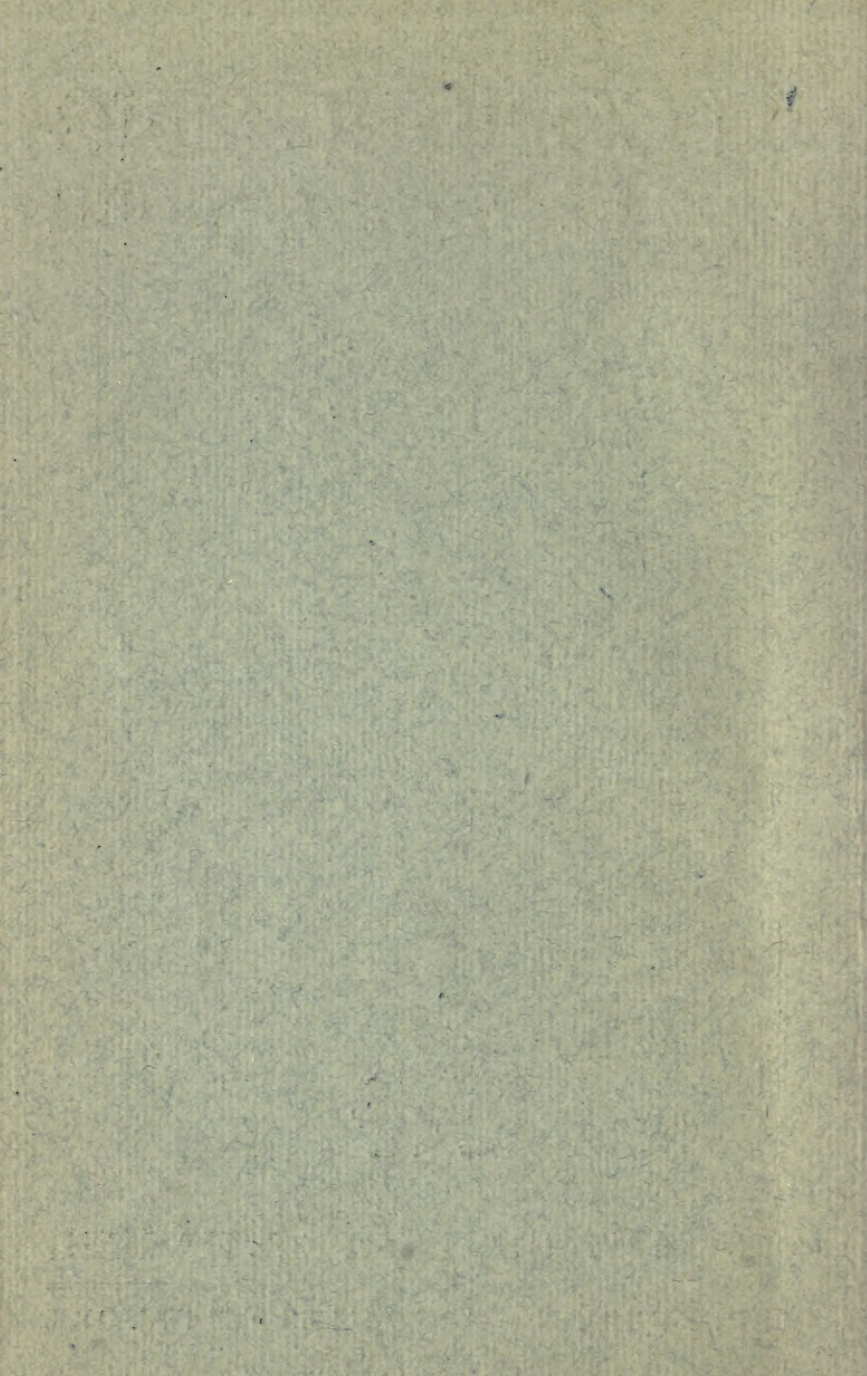
ON CONDUCTING BY FELIX WEINGARTNER

TRANSLATED BY
ERNEST NEWMAN



NDON W. BREITKOPF & HÄRTEL
===== 54, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET =====
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1906



ON CONDUCTING

BY

FELIX WEINGARTNER

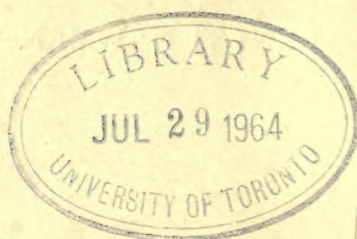
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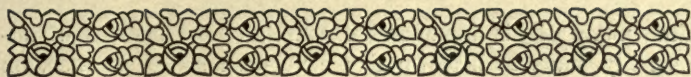
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

Herr WEINGARTNER's "On Conducting" first appeared in the "Neue Deutsche Rundschau", Berlin, and then in book form in 1895. A second edition, not differing from the first, appeared in 1896. The third edition, from which the present translation is made, was issued in 1905; it omits so much that was in the first edition, and contains so much that did not appear there, as to be practically an entirely new treatise. I have added a few notes in order to make a point here and there clearer to the English reader.

E. N.



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Under the same title as that of the present volume, RICHARD WAGNER published in 1869 his well-known *brochure*¹, which, assailing as it did with uncompromising candour the most famous conductors of that epoch, drew upon him the furious enmity of the persons he attacked. In spite, however, of the hatred, open or concealed, of the music-popes whose infallibility was assailed, WAGNER's book laid the foundation for a new understanding of the function of the conductor, in whom we now recognise not only the external factor that holds together an orchestral, choral or operatic performance, but above all the spiritualizing internal factor that gives the performance its very soul. WAGNER was certainly not the first to realise how much depends on the way a piece of music is rendered. He opines that the reason BACH rarely marked tempi in his scores was because he said to himself, as it were, "If anyone does not understand my theme and my figuration, has no feeling for their character and their expression, of what use will an Italian tempo-indication be to him?" I maintain, on the contrary, that the vigorous old master would have been incapable of looking at art in this resigned way. I believe rather that he so rarely indicated the tempo or gave any dynamic marks only because he always had in view his own presence at the performances. If we picture to ourselves a BACH performance in his own lifetime we must think of himself at the organ with his little band of musicians round him.

¹ "Über das Dirigieren." The book was translated into English in 1887 by Mr. EDWARD DANNREUTHER. Mr. ASHTON ELLIS's version appears in Volume IV of his translation of WAGNER's complete Prose Works. [Tr.]

How many of his innumerable cantatas, now assured of immortality, must in his own day have been sung just once, on the Feast-day for which they were composed, whereupon the manuscript went into the drawer "with the others", and for the next Feast-day the inexhaustible Cantor wrote a new one! His Suites and Concertos, again, are to be regarded as chamber-music works at whose production he himself or a privileged pupil sat at the clavicembalo; the "Well-tempered Clavier" and the Sonatas were intended as studies. Why should he waste time in noting down instructions for execution? It always rested with him to give the correct tempo, and to explain to the musicians the interpretation he wanted. The mighty teacher of the Thomas-School certainly never anticipated a collected edition of his works, in preparing which the editors were often greatly puzzled by the careless figuring of the bass — which again shows that he knew the execution of the *continuo*¹ to be in trusty hands; nor did he anticipate concert productions of them with large orchestras and choruses.

How much MOZART considered the question of interpretation is to be seen in the careful way he has marked his works (especially his latest), and from many passages in his letters. It is not improbable that in Mannheim he heard for the first time an orchestra that could really play *crescendo* and *diminuendo*. Even our best orchestras of to-day need to be constantly told that the increase and decrease of tone is to be done evenly and gradually, not suddenly; and the difficulty of doing this increases with the number of bars over which these variations in volume have to be extended. "*Diminuendo* signifies *forte*, *crescendo* signifies *piano*", said BÜLOW. This is only a seeming contradiction, since to play *forte* at the beginning of a *crescendo*, and *piano* at the beginning of a *diminuendo*, really means the negation of *crescendo* and *diminuendo*. We know that not only MOZART, but WEBER, MENDELSSOHN and SPOHR were excellent conductors, and that each

¹ The "continuo" or "basso continuo" is the equivalent of the English thorough-bass. [Tr.]

of them, from his own artistic standpoint, fought energetically against abuses and errors of taste. How WAGNER did this is shown among other things in the book of his I have mentioned. This, however, with all its perfect outspokenness, seems quite mild when we read the flaming words with which BERLIOZ opens his treatise on "The theory of the conductor's art". He says: —

"Singers have often been reproached with being the most dangerous of the factors concerned in the production of music; but, I think, unjustly. The most formidable intermediary is in my opinion the conductor. A bad singer can spoil only his own part, while an incompetent or malicious conductor can spoil everything. The composer must indeed count himself fortunate when the conductor into whose hands he has fallen is not both incompetent *and* malicious; for against the destructive influence of such a man nothing can avail. The most excellent orchestra is crippled by him; the finest singers are perplexed and exhausted; there is no longer any ardour or precision in the rendering. Under conducting of this kind the composer's finest audacities become mere oddities; enthusiasm is killed; inspiration comes precipitately to earth; the angel's wings are clipped; a genius is made to look like an eccentric or a madman; the godlike statue is thrown from its pedestal and dragged in the mud. The worst of it is that the public, no matter how good its musical education may be, is not in a position, at the first performance of a new work, to detect the mutilations, stupidities, errors and sins against art that such a conductor has on his conscience."

What experiences BERLIOZ must have had for this wild cry to be drawn from him can be estimated from the single fact that a conductor who in the first half of the nineteenth century occupied a really foremost position, and of whom both WAGNER and BERLIOZ spoke with the warmest acknowledgement, — that HABENECK of Paris, as BERLIOZ tells us, conducted not from the score but from a *violin part*, a custom to-day confined to beer-garden concerts with their waltzes and pot-pourris. Yet HABENECK, by means of diligent rehearsals

with the orchestra of the Conservatoire, must have given performances of a technical perfection that as a rule could not be met with in Germany at the same time; WAGNER confesses that it was from HABENECK's rendering that he first really understood BEETHOVEN's Ninth Symphony, after having received at the Leipzig Gewandhaus such confused impressions of it that for a time he "had his doubts" even about BEETHOVEN himself¹. Like so many things in WAGNER's writings, these "doubts" must not be taken literally, for a musician of his rank must have been able to judge from his knowledge of the score — of which indeed he had made a manuscript copy for himself — how much of the confused impression was due to the work and how much to the rendering. The fact remains, however, that a bad interpretation can not only completely deceive the uninstructed but also prevent the instructed from listening with full sympathy. I still remember in the early eighties, when I was a pupil at the Leipzig Conservatoire, to have heard some performances by the splendid Gewandhaus orchestra, which, through the fault of its half solid, half elegant conductor, answered so little to the ideas I had formed for myself of the works in question, that I preferred not to stay to the end of many of the performances, so as not to have my precious picture marred. Of course I did not "have doubts" about any of our masters. Only my longing increased to be able at some time to render the works as I felt them. As I gave imprudently outspoken expression to this desire and to my dissatisfaction with what I heard, it was looked upon as unwarrantable self-glorification on my part. However, as BÜLOW soon afterwards appeared with the Meiningen orchestra, people then realised what was meant by a finely-balanced *ensemble*; and I heard much agreement expressed with what I had previously maintained. The impression of BÜLOW's interpretations must have kindled in our Leipzig conductor a spark of that temperament that had been long extinguished under

¹ See Mr. ELLIS's translation of WAGNER's Prose-Works, vol. IV, pp. 300—302. [Tr.]

the ashes of convention, for at one of the concerts given after the visit of the Meiningen band he played the great "Leonora" overture in a quite surprising way. It was especially noticeable, however, that he did not imitate BÜLOW's arbitrarinesses, — of which I shall speak later — but let the work unfold itself in great-featured simplicity. And as his was the larger and better orchestra, the effect was such that the generally rather reserved audience broke out into a huge exclamation of joy, that even surpassed the storms of applause that had been given to BÜLOW. In a few minutes the *Zopf*¹ was blown away as by a breeze from heaven, all arbitrariness was banished, and BEETHOVEN *spoke to us without commentary*. This experience was very instructive to me.

When WAGNER, after his first Parisian sojourn, came to Dresden as conductor, he had learned from HABENECK to what perfection orchestral performances can attain under conscientious guidance; and from all we have learned of him as conductor, from himself and from others, he obviously aimed in his own performances not only at correctness but at bringing out that to which the sounds and notes are only the *means*. He sought for the unifying thread, the psychological line, the revelation of which suddenly transforms, as if by magic, a more or less indefinite sound-picture into a beautifully shaped, heart-moving vision, making people ask themselves in astonishment how it is that this work, which they had long thought they knew, should have all at once become quite another thing, and the unprejudiced mind joyfully confesses, "Yes, thus, *thus*, must it really be". Out of the garment of tone there emerges the *spirit of the artwork*; its noble countenance, formerly only confusedly visible, is now unveiled, and enraptures those who are privileged to behold it. WAGNER calls this form, this quintessence, this spirit of the artwork its *melos*, which term, later on, was perverted by inability to understand WAGNER's own creations into "endless melody". His desire to make this *melos* stand out clearly

¹ The German term "*Zopf*" — literally "pigtail" — is used to denote a pedantic, obsolete style in art. [Tr.]

carried him so far that in some places in BEETHOVEN's works where he held the evident purpose of the composer to be not fully realised in the orchestration, — whether because the instruments at BEETHOVEN's disposal were imperfect, or because his increasing deafness sometimes clouded his perception of the relations of the various orchestral timbres, — he discreetly altered the orchestration, touching it up so as to bring the hitherto unclear melody into due prominence. Of course the music-popes and wretched literalists screamed anathema. It is certainly open to question whether all these retouchings were happy and deserving of imitation; there is no doubt however that he very often hit upon the right thing. I believe, for example, that nowadays no conductor who can think at all will play the Ninth Symphony without WAGNER's instrumental emendations; the vocal changes, on the contrary, I look upon as both purposeless and tasteless¹.

Added to this desire for clarity in WAGNER was the passionate temperament with which, aided by a keen understanding, he threw himself into his work; he brought to it also a faculty of *immediate communication* with the players and imposition of his will on them, — in a word that genius which, in spite of other acknowledgments, he had to deny to HABENCK, but which made some of his own performances historically memorable, in spite of the perishable nature of all reproductive art. *There is no performance of genius possible without temperament.* This truth must be perpetually insisted on, notwithstanding that SCHOPENHAUER has voiced it distinctly enough. Temperament, however, can be given neither by education, nor conscientiousness, nor, by the way, by favour; it must be *inborn*, the free gift of nature. Therefore performances of genius can only receive recognition either by another genius, — just as the height and beauty of a mountain are best appreciated from another summit, — or by that naïve instinct, often found among non-artists and the people,

¹ See WAGNER's article on "The Rendering of BEETHOVEN's Ninth Symphony, in Vol. V of Mr. ELLIS's translation of the Prose Works. [Tr.]

that gives itself up spontaneously to the beautiful. But they are quite incomprehensible to those "æsthètes" who consider them as problems of the understanding and would solve them, like a mathematical problem, by analysis, — incomprehensible not only because temperament is an endowment of the heart, not of the understanding, but also because the curb that the artist has to put on his temperament has to be directed by head and heart, not by the former alone. Hence in most cases critical æsthetic and æstheticising criticism pass undeserved censure — honest as the intention may be, — on performances of genius, and only gradually attain to the correct view when the naïve instinct to which I have referred has given its final verdict, and disparagement would now be like flying in the face of a *plébiscite*. Artistic truth bears a prophetic, critical truth a posthumous character; from this comes that blind adulation we sometimes see — especially in cases where the earlier condemnation had been particularly strong — that will not allow the slightest weakness to be pointed out in the idol.

I regret that I never saw WAGNER conduct. He was described to me; the body, of no more than middle-height, with its stiff deportment, the movement of the arms not immoderately great or sweeping, but decisive and very much to the point; showing no restlessness, in spite of his vivacity; usually not needing the score at the concert; fixing his expressive glance on the players and ruling the orchestra imperially, like the WEBER he used to admire as a boy. The old flautist FÜRSTENAU of Dresden told me that often, when WAGNER conducted, the players had no sense of being led. Each believed himself to be following freely his own feeling, yet they all worked together wonderfully. It was WAGNER's mighty will that powerfully but unperceived had overborne their single wills, so that each thought himself free, while in reality he only followed the leader, whose artistic force lived and worked in him. "Everything went so easily and beautifully that it was the height of enjoyment", said FÜRSTENAU; and the eyes of the old artist gleamed with joyful enthusiasm.

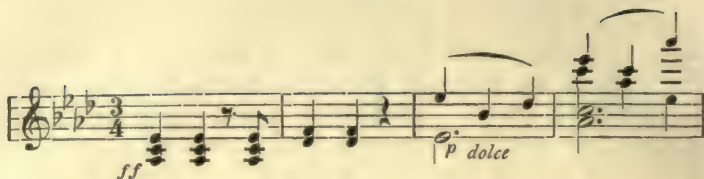
After WAGNER had given up regular conducting he sought to transfer his feeling, his insight and his power to some younger, plastic spirits in whom they might live on. His plan of an ideal school, where singers and conductors of the type he desired should be trained¹, was not realised owing to the indolence of his contemporaries. A few young musicians associated themselves with him, to whom he now imparted of his spirit. Of these, the oldest is the most significant — his intimate friend, at that time his most faithful champion, his *alter ego*, as he himself once called him — the master-conductor HANS VON BÜLOW. After a comparatively short co-operation they had to part company, and BÜLOW's star first shone brilliantly again when in 1880 he became chief of the Meiningen orchestra. A year later the Duke, whose scenic art had already effectively influenced the dramatic theatre, sent him off with the orchestra on a grand concert-tour through Germany, Austria and Russia. Seldom has such a victory of mind over matter been seen. A rather poorly-appointed orchestra, by no means absolutely excellent in its proportions, conquered everywhere the large orchestras, famous the whole world over as possessing the best artists; this was the work of the eminent conductor, who — a second Leonidas — had the courage to defy with a small troop of admirably schooled players the big musical armies that were mostly led by ordinary time-beaters. By dint of diligent, indefatigable practice he had so infused into the orchestra his own conception of the works as to get a perfection of *ensemble* at that time unknown. The most scrupulous rhythmical exactitude was united with so artistic a balance of the various timbres, that the question whether this or that player was the better, or whether this or that peculiarity of the conductor was justifiable, could scarcely be raised. The orchestra seemed to be a single instrument, on which BÜLOW played as on a pianoforte.

¹ WAGNER's "Report to His Majesty King Ludwig II of Bavaria upon a German Music-School to be founded in Munich" is translated in Mr. ELLIS's fourth volume. [Tr.]

These concert-tours of the Meiningen orchestra were of inestimable significance. Those whom it concerned recognised that it would not do to go on simply beating time and playing away with the old reprehensible carelessness and thoughtlessness, for that would certainly lower them in the eyes of the public, which, after once having nibbled dainties at the table of the great, would no longer be content with canteen-fare. So these people first of all took pains to cultivate the orchestra better on the technical side, held more rehearsals; followed more conscientiously the dynamic indications, and in general gave more attention to accurate *ensemble*. The capability of orchestras has since then greatly increased, and composers to-day can set problems that even a few years ago would have seemed insoluble, while at the same time a better rendering of the works of the old masters has been made possible. These things represent the *gain* from BÜLOW's work; and make his name an ineradicable landmark in the evolution of the art of conducting; to him alone, after those great composers who themselves were notable conductors, we owe the diffusion and the strengthening of the consciousness that conducting is an art and not a handicraft.

But BÜLOW's work had also its harmful features, for which the guilt lies both with himself and a number of his followers; and to expose these and attack them is as much a duty of sincerity as to acknowledge the gains with frank delight. In the first place, it cannot be denied that even while he was leader of the Meiningen orchestra there was often to be detected a *pedagogic element* in BÜLOW's renderings. It was clearly seen that he wished to deal a blow on the one side at philistine, metronomic time-beating, on the other side at a certain elegant off-handedness. Where a modification of the tempo was necessary to get expressive phrasing, it happened that in order to make this modification quite clear to his hearers he *exaggerated* it; indeed, he fell into a quite new tempo that was a negation of the main one. The "Egmont" overture was a case in point. WAGNER tells us¹, *à propos* of this motive —

¹ See "About Conducting", pp. 332, 333, in Mr. ELLIS's fourth vol. [Tr.]



— which, as he says, “is so drastic an epitome of terrific earnestness and placid self-confidence”, and which, as a rule, “was tossed about like a withered leaf in the uncontrollable rush of the *allegro*” — that he induced BÜLOW to play it in the true sense of the composer, modifying “ever so little” the hitherto passionate tempo, “so that the orchestra might have a proper chance to accentuate this dual theme, with its rapid fluctuation between great energy and thoughtful self-content”. All who have heard this overture under BÜLOW must agree with me that at the place in question he by no means made “ever so little” a modification, but leaped at once from the *allegro* into an *andante grave*, thereby destroying the uniform tempo that should be preserved in the *allegro* of the overture, as in general in every piece of music that has a uniform tempo-mark at the beginning. The proper expression can be obtained *without* any change of the main tempo, — be it “ever so little” — if the strings, who have the first two bars of the theme, are told to bring them out energetically and very precisely by a uniform down-bowing of the crotchets, thus preventing the last quaver of the first bar from being turned, as often happens, into a semiquaver, whereby indeed, as WAGNER says, the effect of a dance-step is given; and when we consider that the tempo of the main part of the overture is just *allegro*, not *vivace*, there can be no danger of an “uncontrollable allegro-rush” if the tempo is correct. It is a common source of trouble that introductions are taken very slowly and the main sections very fast, and the numerous gradations of these broad tempo-differences scarcely observed. We often hear the beginning of the Seventh Symphony taken *adagio*, whereas it is marked *poco sostenuto*; the finale of the Fourth Symphony is usually taken *presto*,

whereas the humour of the movement only comes out when attention is given to BEETHOVEN's marking, which is "*allegro ma non tanto*". The introduction to the "Egmont" overture is marked *sostenuto*, *ma non troppo*, which does not at all signify an actually slow tempo; while the next section is marked *allegro*, that only increases to *allegro con brio* at the end, — which again, however, does not imply an immoderately rapid tempo. The maintenance of an essentially easy tempo just suits the tragic weight of the work, that is completely destroyed by hurrying. The only way I can express the distinction between the introduction (that should be taken with three moderate beats), and the main portion, is that one bar of the $\frac{3}{4}$ section is about equivalent to a minim, and so to a third of a bar in the $\frac{3}{2}$ section, whereby the crotchets at the entry of the *allegro* do not become about half what they are in the introduction. In this way any *ritenuto* at the place in question is superfluous, and the "terrific earnestness" of the



and the "calm self-confidence" of the two following bars are made perfectly clear¹.

WAGNER quite rightly contended against the scherzo-tempo in which it had become usual to take the third movement of the Eighth Symphony, and claimed that it should go in comfortable minuet-time. Under BÜLOW, however, I heard this movement played so slowly that its humorous cheerfulness was replaced by an almost disagreeable seriousness.

¹ This passage will become clearer to the reader if he will refer to the score of the overture. If the tempi recommended by Herr WEINGARTNER are adopted, it is evident that since one bar of the *allegro* = a third of a bar of the introduction, three crotchets in the former = one minim (or two crotchets) in the latter. The *allegro* is thus faster than the introduction in the proportion of 3 to 2. By abstaining from taking the *allegro* so fast that the proportion would be as 4 to 2, the tempo is not rapid enough to need any "holding-back" at the place WAGNER discusses. [Tr.]

It certainly belies the titanic character of the "Coriolan" Overture when, as usually happens, the chief theme



and all that follows it are taken in a flying *presto* instead of *allegro con brio*; but BÜLOW began it almost *andante* and then increased the tempo until the pause in the seventh bar, to begin again *andante* and accelerate the sequence in the same way. In the first place, taking the incredibly characteristic theme in this way robs it of its monumental strength; in the second place, I hold that if BEETHOVEN had wanted these subtleties he would have indicated them, since he always gave his directions for performance with the greatest precision.

BÜLOW's *purpose* as such was always clearly recognisable and also quite correct. It was as if he said to his audience, and more especially to the players: "This extremely significant passage in the "Egmont" Overture must not be scrambled through thoughtlessly; the comfortable, easy-going minuet of the Eighth Symphony must not be turned into a scherzo; the main theme of the "Coriolan" Overture must be given out in a way conformable to the dignity of the work." But in the effort to be excessively clear he often went too far. His quondam hearers and admirers will recollect that often when he had worked out a passage in an especially plastic form he turned round to the public, perhaps expecting to see some astonished faces, chiefly, however, to say "See, that's how it should be done!" But if the Venus of Melos, for example,

were suddenly to begin to speak, and to give us a lecture on the laws of her conformation, we should be a good deal sobered down. Art-works and art-performances exist only for the sake of themselves and their own beauty. If they pursue a "tendentious" aim, even though this should be instructive in the best sense, the bloom goes off them. From "tendencies" of this kind BÜLOW's interpretations were seldom quite free. Thence came also his proneness to make details excessively prominent. In an art-work, indeed, no one part is of less significance than another, and *each* detail has its full *raison d'être*, but only in so far as it is subordinated to a homogeneous conception of the essential nature of the whole work, — a continuous conception that dominates all detail.

It is this homogeneous conception of the essential nature of a musical work that constitutes what there is of specially artistic in its interpretation; it originates in a deep feeling that is not dependent on the intellect, that cannot, indeed, even be influenced by this, while it itself must dominate everything that pertains to the intellect, — such as routine, technique, and calculation of effects. If this feeling is not strong enough, then the intellect usurps the foremost place and leads, as was often the case with BÜLOW, to a propensity to ingenious analysis. In the contrary case the feeling becomes unwholesomely powerful and leads to unclearness, false sentimentality and emotional vagueness. If neither feeling nor intellect is strong enough, then we get, according to the prevailing fashion, either mere metronomic time-beating or a senseless mania for *nuance*, a mania that chiefly prompted me to write this book. Neither, however, has anything to do with art, which is at its best when that exceedingly delicate balance, — more a matter of intuition than of calculation, — is attained between the feeling and the intellect, which alone can give a performance true vitality and veracity.

Here I must digress to contradict sharply an opinion that has considerable vogue. The interpreter — in our case the conductor — is not able to increase the worth of a work; he can merely diminish this occasionally, since the best that

he can give is simply a rendering on a par with the real value of the work. He has done the best that is possible if his performance expresses just what the composer meant; anything more there is not and cannot be, since no conductor in the world can, by his interpretation, make a good work out of a bad one. What is bad remains bad, no matter how well it is played; indeed, a particularly good performance will bring out the defects of a work more clearly than an inferior one. The remark: "The work owed its success to its excellent interpretation" contains a half-truth, since the interpreter is entitled to the recognition of his undoubted deserts; but the composer has a still higher right, for it was he who made it possible for the interpreter to achieve a success with the work. If however the critic inserts in the above sentence a "solely" or "exclusively", then he either falls into an error arising from the pre-conceived opinion I have spoken of, or else he indulges in a piece of dishonesty in order to depreciate the success of composers he does not like — unless, which is indeed the more convenient course, he prefers to ignore this success altogether. How often, for example, have we heard this ludicrous phrase repeated, since some modern conductors recognised their duty and played BERLIOZ's works in a proper manner? The deeper impression now made by the works could of course not be denied; but the credit for the greater effect they made had to go entirely to the conductors, not to the works themselves, to which people were, and indeed in some quarters still are, as unfavourably disposed as of yore. But what had the conductors done, except by means of their interpretation brought something into the light that had really been there all the time? That of course is a great merit; but it must not be exploited to the disadvantage of the composer, who *made* what the interpreter could only *reproduce*. "Yet", it has been and perhaps will be objected, "we can listen to BEETHOVEN and MOZART even when badly played; but BERLIOZ is only enjoyable when so-and-so conducts him." This, I take leave to say, is another great mistake, for in the first place BEETHOVEN and MOZART, badly played, are likewise unenjoyable; the public

however has heard these works so often and played them more or less efficiently on the piano, that it can discover the familiar beloved features even in a performance that disfigures them — can even perhaps imagine these features when they are barely recognisable; which is naturally impossible in the case of a work it does not know, such as a rarely-given composition of BERLIOZ or a novelty. But how feeble is the applause one usually hears after an indifferently played classical symphony, in comparison with the uncontrollable enthusiasm aroused by an artistic interpretation of the same work! Then the masterpiece appears in its true form; to be able to make this true form visible, however, is the sacred task of the conductor, and to have fulfilled it is his only honourable — nay, his *only possible* — glory. A good performance of a poor work is of no artistic consequence, and regrettable both because it furthers bad taste and because it means time and labour unprofitably squandered. The reverse case — to perform a good work badly — is inexcusable. Equally inexcusable is it, however, to set up off-hand the interpretation against the work in cases where *both* have contributed to make the artistic impression. To do this is to exhibit the conductor's function in a wholly false light, to put him, in comparison with the composer, disproportionately into the foreground, and merely serves to inflict as much harm as possible on the latter; wherefore it is generally done with that specific end in view — whether as a mere echoing of personal or partisan prejudice, or as a result of some of those sinister currents that run so strongly beneath our artist-life, and against which the individual has often a bitter fight. The effort to escape this fight, or at least to lessen it as much as possible, gives rise to the mania for founding “Unions” and “Societies”, which, on the principle of *manus manum lavat*, may sometimes turn these currents to their own profit, sometimes nullify them. If Stauffacher's saying “United, even the weak become strong” is true for those who work merely for the success of a day, yet for eternity, i. e. for the kingdom of free and progressive souls above time and space,

Tell's quiet, splendid answer is always true, — "The strong man is strongest when *alone*".

The pedagogic element I have referred to in BÜLOW's performances became more prominent in the last years of his life; it was linked with a capriciousness that was probably increased by his physical sufferings and his consequent spiritual distemper. This capriciousness led him into eccentricities that had no object, not even a pedagogic one, and that could have been thought fine only by those who, having quite lost the capacity for thinking for themselves, fell at BÜLOW's feet in blind idolatry, and pocketed his insults submissively when he now and then treated them as they deserved. Through his habit of making speeches at his concerts he committed such errors of taste that it was difficult to maintain unimpaired the feeling of esteem that could in the most heartfelt way be given to the earlier BÜLOW. It was sad to see the public rushing to his concerts with the question "What will he be up to to-day?"

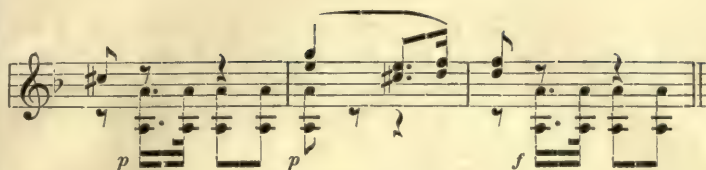
I would gladly spare myself the ungrateful work of enumerating some examples I myself saw of his eccentricities, if it were not necessary later on to speak of their results. In a performance of the Ninth Symphony in Berlin he began the first movement remarkably fast, and not until the entry of the main theme —



did he adopt a broader tempo. In these chords, however —



he suddenly became almost twice as slow, and remained so until he came to this passage, —



when he just as suddenly went off again into quite a fast tempo. What was the object of these unmotivated, spasmodic derangements of the tempo? In the same performance of the Ninth Symphony I heard him render the wonderful, passion-free *andante* melody of the third movement with the following *nuances*:



making it sound like some ardent love-lament out of an Italian opera. The truth is that BEETHOVEN'S markings of "espressivo" and "crescendo" are to be interpreted discreetly, in a delicate sense consistent with the nature of the whole movement; any disturbance of the tempo must be completely bad. One of those idolators I have mentioned, to whom I expressed my surprise at this downright odious treatment of the divine melody, replied to me, "Yes, yes, you are right, but BÜLOW is BÜLOW; *he may do anything*". O blind fetish-worship and uncritical adulation, what harm have you not done!

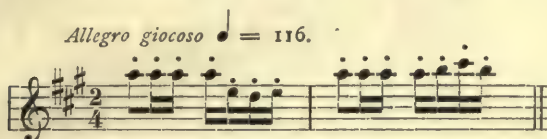
In the oboe solo in the Trio of the Scherzo, he altered a C to B in the second bassoon part without any reason, whereby the rather harsh but extremely characteristic progression of the bass was made weakly chromatic. A similarly quite unmotivated and enfeebling substitution was that of

a characterless D for the energetic C at the beginning of the great violin-passage in the third "Leonora" Overture. The Eighth Symphony he once began very quickly, took the 5th, 6th, and 7th bars quite slowly, then in the 8th bar came back to his opening tempo. And so on.

The impression given by performances of this kind was that not the work but the conductor was the chief thing, and that he wanted to divert the attention of the audience from the music to himself; so that finally there was nothing to admire but the readiness with which the orchestra followed him in his sometimes singular fancies.

One of these was the cause of a complete rupture between BÜLOW and myself. I made his personal acquaintance in Eisenach, where he and the Meiningen orchestra gave a concert I shall never forget, at which there was a very impressive rendering of BEETHOVEN's C minor Symphony. Here I had the honour to be presented to him by LISZT. He interested himself in me, later on gave a little composition of mine for string orchestra, and, the post of conductor at Hanover being then vacant through the death of ERNST FRANK, recommended me — without success, — to his friend BRONSART, the director. When the post of second conductor in Meiningen became open through the departure of MANNSTAEDT, I applied for it, hoping to learn a good deal by working under BÜLOW. I went to see him in Berlin about it. He spoke at once of my application, and said to me literally: "I cannot make use of you; you are too independent for me. I must have some one who will do absolutely only what *I* wish. This you could not and would not do." I fully agreed with him, of course. He then advised me not to turn up my nose at the most unimportant post if only I were independent — so far as this is possible in the theatre — and above all had no other conductor over me. Thereupon we separated. Two years later we met in Hamburg. He had engaged himself to the director POLLINI to conduct thirty opera-performances in the season 1887/8; I was engaged as permanent conductor there. The first opera that he took up was "Carmen". I am still convinced, and was so from the first moment, that at that

time he was bent on the joke of trying what you can palm off on the public if you bear a famous name, — a practice that has unfortunately found its counterpart to-day in the field of composition. He took almost all “Carmen”, that is so full of passion and piquancy, in a tempo that was often intolerably slow and dragging, — the beginning, for example



almost *andante*, and Escamillo's song



Auf in den Kampf To - re - ro!

downright *adagio*. He further foisted on the work so many *nuances*, “breath-pauses”, and the like, that it would have greatly astonished Bizet to have heard his opera thus given. BÜLOW had the satisfaction of knowing that his joke succeeded completely. His admirers and the critics agreed that now for the first time the true and only right conception of “Carmen” was given to the world. This opinion indeed found some support in the fact that the *ensemble* was faultless and the opera given without cuts, which were unusual things at the Hamburg Stadttheater. When questioned about his remarkably slow tempi, BÜLOW replied that “he intended in this way to suggest the dignity of the Spaniards”. This remark, that was merely a jest and not a particularly good one, also met with general admiration, — except from me. I soon found an opportunity to confirm my opinion by acts. BÜLOW being prevented from conducting “Carmen” once, it fell to my lot to do so, and later on to alternate with him. It was absolutely impossible for me to imitate him, and, against my own convictions, to take the opera in his style. I therefore held a rehearsal of my own, and conducted as I felt was right, in

accordance with the instructions of the composer, in a generally lively tempo, without any affected *nuances*, to the joy of the orchestra and of such singers as dared to express their opinion. After I had conducted two performances, BÜLOW ran to POLLINI, complained that by my “arbitrary notions” I would spoil the opera for him, and insisted that I should not conduct it any more. POLLINI told me of this in the friendliest way, and, with the excuse that he did not want to fall out with the always irritated BÜLOW, turned “Carmen” over to a colleague, who was very proud to take the opera “just like BÜLOW”.

Could BÜLOW really not see from this much-discussed affair that he was blaming me for his own fault, since not I, who restored the unequivocal directions of BIZET, was the arbitrary one, but he, who had disregarded them? At any rate he never forgave me for having been sharp enough to see through his joke, and having dared to be “independent” with regard to him; and whereas on my arrival in Hamburg he had received me very cordially, he now lost no opportunity of showing his displeasure with me, which culminated in a public expression of his antipathy to me in full view of the audience, during some performances that I conducted. Nor was his temper towards me any more friendly when some years later in Berlin I tried to exert an influence on the Symphony Concerts; his jeering remarks, however, in which he gave free play to his wrath against me, and which his friends took good care should be spread abroad, necessarily kept me out of his company, much to my regret. Nothing could prejudice the admiration I had for what was great in him. In the present book, however, I hope that by separating the insignificant and the paltry I have shown his greatness in its true light; and while I steadfastly maintain a standpoint in many respects contrary to his, I render — what objective history will some day render to this most successful furtherer of that art of conducting that WAGNER brought into new being — honour and respect.

I once saw this aphorism in a humorous paper: "Nothing misleads us more than when a wise man does something stupid, since it is just this that we are apt to imitate in him." A true saying, true at all times and especially in the present day. It characterises in vigorous words that epigonism that is not able to comprehend a great personality as a whole, yet wants to do as it does, and believes it can attain this by imitating this or that feature of it. But it is just the significant and characteristic features that cannot be imitated, since these pertain to genius alone, and to each genius again in a particular way. So much the more zealously, however, are the seeming and often even the real weaknesses of eminent minds imitated, since it is only in these that the great man has any actual affinity with the dullard. When WAGNER finally broke with the form of the so-called grand opera, that had been degraded to a mere superficial show, and built the musical drama out of poetic purposes, people ought to have seen that it needs a stupendous capacity to cast in one piece an entire Act, — in which the music flows on without a break, while not only is the dialogue replaced by recitative, but a symphonic development answering to the logic of the poem runs through the Act from beginning to end, — and further to bind the separate Acts together in the right relation to each other, — that this is surely much harder than to write a succession of arias, duets, *ensembles* and finales without any musical connection between them, so that the composer could, if he pleased, begin as the old masters did at the end or in the middle, the demand for logical development and treatment extending no further than the narrow sphere of each separate and relatively short number. What was it, however, that after WAGNER had gradually become popular stimulated modern Germany to composition? Not at all the reflection whether and how the problem posed by him could be worked out to a still further solution, but the *apparent* casting of form to the winds in the Wagnerian drama. Before that time anyone who wanted to write an opera had to master thoroughly musical structure and form. *This* they could as a matter of fact all do; even the non-

geniuses wrote in a quite solid style. Nowadays almost everyone who has learned to orchestrate a little, but is hardly able to put a pure four-part piece together, thinks he must write a "music-drama". That deliverance of the opera from senseless convention for which WAGNER longed and worked is regarded by these people as the emancipation of their own ego from the obligations of studying seriously, practising counterpoint, and being sternly critical of their own work. WAGNER has sanctioned formlessness, has discarded arias and *ensembles*; therefore away with arias, away with *ensembles*, don the biretta gaily and give your fantasy free rein to declaim as it likes! Use as much brass as possible, divided strings, stopped notes and harp-glissandi, pile up the most unusual harmonies and modulations, and there you are! I am the last to deny the inevitability of a kind of WAGNER-epigonism; I fell into it indeed myself in my first two attempts at opera, about twenty years ago. Neither do I misjudge the relative value of some of the modern music-dramas that have sprung directly from his influence. A force of such vehement revolutionary power as WAGNER, at once strong and tenacious, is bound to leave deep traces behind it, and a new dramatic style in music will develop with all the more difficulty in proportion to the impossibility of eliminating from such a style the essential part of the Wagnerian reform. WAGNER's world of feeling and his view of life may come to be alien to us, and later on we may also bring the most objective criticism to bear upon his work; but that he has shown the obvious gulf between the dramatic art and the form of the old opera, even in its masterpieces, this will remain his enduring service, from which no dramatic composer of the future will be able to get away, even though his own works may be quite independent. He only is *original* who remains *natural*, and to have made it possible to be natural in the musical drama is the great step signified by WAGNER's achievement. But I am astonished how little the real significance of this step has hitherto been understood, and therefore how little influence so pregnant a phenomenon as WAGNER has had on the choice of opera-poems, which lay at the very

root of his reformatory work. It is really lamentable how many accomplished musicians have squandered much painful and often clever work on texts the impossibility of which could have been seen at a glance by anyone with an eye for the stage. Much better to have no more operas at all than the poetical monstrosities that are to-day set to music. So long as there is any truth in the judgment that "the music is good but the text bad", I cannot believe the style is original, or even a worthy following in WAGNER's footsteps.

It must be acknowledged that in all these WAGNER-imitations, even in the weakest, there is one ideal feature, namely the effort to draw close to a great exemplar. Not only the great, however, but the little and the paltry are also copied if they are successful, especially in our present industrial epoch, when the royalty has become the guardian angel of art. What was it but the plenteous royalties brought to its author by a work like "Cavalleria Rusticana", — on the quality of which I will not enlarge here — that called forth in Germany, the land of BACH and BEETHOVEN, a veritable deluge of musical "one acts" compounded of adultery, murder and homicide? Sad as this was, one really blushed to see a German Court even offer a prize for the "best" of these wretched imitations, and actually divide it between two composers. The prize should have gone by rights to the Parisian public, which, while Germany crawled on its belly to "realism", had the good taste to decline to have anything to do with it.


It almost goes without saying that the striking phenomenon of such a conductor as HANS VON BÜLOW was bound to lead to imitations. A whole tribe of "little Bülows" sprang up, who copied the great BÜLOW in everything they could — his nervous movements, his imperial pose, his stabs with the baton, his furious glances at the audience when anything disturbed him, his half instinctive, half demonstrative look round at some special *nuance*, and finally the *nuances* themselves. His concert-speeches alone no one dared to imitate. I have ventured to label this kind of conductor, whose manner was a more or less complete caricature of his master's, the "tempo-

rubato conductor". WAGNER speaks of "elegant" conductors, at the head of whom, — whether with justice I rather doubt, — he puts MENDELSSOHN, — conductors who skip in the fastest possible tempo over passages that are difficult and at first sight obscure¹. The tempo-rubato conductors were the exact opposite to these; they sought to make the clearest passages obscure by hunting out insignificant details. Now an inner part of minor importance would be given a significance that by no means belonged to it; now an accent that should have been just lightly marked came out in a sharp *sforzato*; often a so-called "breath-pause" would be inserted, particularly in the case of a *crescendo* immediately followed by a *piano*, as if the music were sprinkled with *fermate*. These little tricks were helped out by continual alterations and dislocations of the tempo. Where a gradual animation or a gentle and delicate slowing-off is required — often however without even that pretext, — a violent, spasmodic *accelerando* or *ritenuto* was made. The latter was more frequent than the former, since as a rule the tendency to drag, — thanks to the sport that has been for some time carried on in Bayreuth with drawn-out tempi² — was stronger than the passion for whipping-up. When the tempo *was* whipped up, however, one received about the same confused impression of the poor dishevelled work that one gets of the parts of the landscape lying nearest the railway track when one whizzes past in an express.

I would here insert a rule, the observance of which I hold to be indispensable for a right apprehension of the *limits* of tempo: No slow tempo must be so slow that the melody of

¹ See Mr. ELLIS's translation of "About Conducting", in WAGNER's Prose Works, Vol. IV, pp. 295, 296, 306—308. WAGNER says MENDELSSOHN himself informed him that "a too slow tempo was the devil, and for choice he would rather things were taken too fast", because "things might be glossed over" by "covering the ground at a stiff pace". [Tr.]

² Herr WEINGARTNER considerably annoyed the Bayreuth partisans by some remarks in the first edition of this book, contending, for example, that if BÜLOW had been given control there after the death of WAGNER certain abuses would not have been allowed to grow up.

the piece is *not yet* recognisable, and no fast tempo so fast that the melody is *no longer* recognisable. 

The rhythmic distortions to which I have referred were in no way justified by any marks of the composer, but always originated with the conductor. With reference to the *sforzati* I have mentioned, however, I will cite the apt remarks of BERLIOZ: —

“A conductor often demands from his players an *exaggeration of the dynamic nuances*, either in this way to give proof of his ardour, or because he lacks fineness of musical perception. Simple shadings then become thick blurs, accents become passionate shrieks. The effects intended by the poor composer are quite distorted and coarsened, and the attempts of the conductor to be artistic, however honest they may be, remind us of the tenderness of the ass in the fable, who knocked his master down in trying to caress him.”

I would add the admonishment always to observe most precisely whether an accent comes in a *forte* or in a *piano* passage, which will determine quite different grades of strength and expression for it. It is also of the utmost importance whether a *succession* of accents occurs in a passage proceeding in uniform loudness, or during a *crescendo* or *diminuendo*, in which latter case the accents also must of course have their own gradual increase or decrease. Obvious as this may seem, it is necessary even with good orchestras to point out emphatically *where* the accents come, and so prevent their being continually hammered out in the one style.

If many of the above-mentioned errors could be supposed to be “proofs of ardour” and of good intention, it was in the end regrettable that by the behaviour, artistic and personal, of some “new-modish Bülowes” so much attention was directed to the person of the conductor that the audience even came to regard the composers as the creatures, as it were, of their interpreters, and in conjunction with the name of a conductor people spoke of “his” BEETHOVEN, “his” BRAHMS, or “his” WAGNER. Of the works played in this eccentric way, however there was often little more left than of a plant that the professor of botany has dissected, and whose torn

leaves, stamens, and pistils, after being demonstrated to the students of the college, lie scattered about on the desk.

— Thus I once heard the “Hebrides” Overture of MENDELSSOHN played with literally not one bar in the same tempo as the rest. Even the second and fourth bars, which are repetitions of the first —



and the third



were “characterised” as against these by means of a pointedly different tempo; and the same kind of thing went on to the end. All that was humanly possible in the way of the unnatural was done, with the result that the lovely work was deformed and its real character obliterated. Certainly it would be just as false to play one crotchet after another with metronomic uniformity; but the modifications of the tempo, some of which MENDELSSOHN himself has indicated, should be done in such a way as not to dismember the organic character of the whole thing — its “melos”, the right comprehension of which, as WAGNER aptly says, gives also the right tempo. At one moment the sea flows quietly round the rocks of Fingal’s Cave, at another a stronger wind produces higher waves and the white foam of the breakers beats more strongly against the beach, — *but the picture of the landscape remains the same*, and there is nothing in MENDELSSOHN’s overture of an actual, formidable storm that could imprint on the scenery a radically different stamp. The atmosphere of gentle, noble melancholy that lends the Hebrides

their peculiar charm is also preserved in the music. Is it then not a matter for vigorous censure when something that a master has sincerely felt and expressed in faultlessly beautiful music is distorted by the irresponsible additions of a conductor?

“To what end is all this?” I asked myself in amazement on these and many other occasions. Why this inordinate desire of some conductors to turn musical works into something other than what they really are? Whence this aversion to maintaining a uniform tempo for any length of time? Whence this rage for introducing *nuances* of which the composer never thought? The reason for these curious phenomena was mostly the personal vanity that was not satisfied with rendering a work in the spirit of its author, but must needs show the audience what it “could make out of this work”. *The conductor’s mania for notoriety was thus put above the spirit of the composer.* The parading of this vanity was due partly to a misconception of the better side of BÜLOW’s work, which founded on WAGNER; partly to a clumsy imitation of the palpable weaknesses and uncalled-for caprices of his later years.

The following instance was communicated to me by a friend. BÜLOW had played the G minor Symphony of MOZART with the Meiningen orchestra, and had produced a deep impression by his temperate handling of the chief theme —



that is sometimes taken thoughtlessly fast, and by his very expressive phrasing throughout the movement. The permanent conductor of the town in question — plainly stimulated by BÜLOW's success — having later on to conduct the same symphony, informed his acquaintances that he would now take the tempi exactly like BÜLOW, and at the performance, at which my friend was present, played the first movement *andante* throughout. The beautiful butterfly, fluttering gently on a summer's day over the sadly inclined campanula, was transformed into a clumsy grasshopper! This was a case of misunderstanding and an overdoing, probably well-meant, of BÜLOW's version. But it was otherwise with what, to my horror, I had to listen to in the Pastoral Symphony. In the "Scene at the Brook", for example, in the following passage —



the conductor made in the second bar a strong *ritenuto* and after the last quaver quite a "breath-pause", so that a complete interruption ensued, and the third bar, detached from the second, came in without any connection. The same thing happened again in the corresponding passage in the recapitulation. After the performance I tried to convince the conductor of the wrongness of his interpretation, pointing out to him that just as it would be impossible for a rippling brook suddenly to be made to stand still, so it was unnatural to interrupt arbitrarily the flow of the music at this point. To my astonishment I got the answer: "I really don't like it myself, but the people here are so accustomed to it like this from BÜLOW that I take it in the same way". I thought

it useless to make any further effort on behalf of truth and nature, since here it was not a case of misunderstanding, but of a conscious imitation of an admitted fault. This is a sample of the most evil feature of that manner of conducting against which I am contending, since the man's own conviction was here sacrificed and the work knowingly disfigured to comply with the habit of the public, and in fear of incurring displeasure by flying in the face of this habit. In many other cases the trouble mostly came from unconscious defect of artistic feeling, and a certain fumbling after something fine without being quite able to achieve it, — much as the good, childlike ANTON BRUCKNER wrote a "Ninth" Symphony *also* in D minor and would *also* have a chorus for the last movement, in which however the "good God" to whom he had dedicated the work wisely prevented him by opportunely recalling him to the celestial land.

BÜLOW, by his arbitrarinesses, had drawn more attention than was necessary to his person, and was unfortunately often commended *for that very reason*, and praised as "clever". These arbitrarinesses had now to be not only copied but exaggerated; i. e., the tempo had to be dislocated not only where BÜLOW had done so but as often and as violently as possible, breath-pauses had to be introduced, extraordinary behaviour had to be indulged in on the platform — in a word, BÜLOW out-Bülowed in the external features of his conducting, so as to win the same or if possible greater successes than he. To make their own, however, just that in virtue of which BÜLOW was really great, — the deep seriousness with which (a few exceptions apart, such as the "Carmen" case I have mentioned) he took his calling, the prodigious zeal and the restless devotion with which, even in his last years, when his powers were no longer at their height, he strove to give the most finished performances possible, which were indeed often so perfect that one could forget his personal peculiarities, — all this was certainly denied to his imitators. Indeed I have often doubted whether those who wanted to be so "ingenious" really knew properly the works they were playing. When I saw that somebody was in-

capable of letting one tempo grow out of another, but made every change with a jerk, or that he began what should have been a long and slow *crescendo* with an explosive *fortissimo*, so that nothing was left over for the finish, this in my opinion pointed not only to a want of proper feeling but also to an insufficient study of the work; being surprised and confused by some passage he had not properly thought out the conductor either flew over it, or else, through would-be "temperament", made too sudden a rush at the *crescendo* and spoilt it.

The difficulty of getting a good *ensemble* in the tempo-rubato manner is all the greater when the conductor goes touring. BÜLOW for some years directed only the Meiningen orchestra, and afterwards only the Philharmonic orchestras in Hamburg and Berlin. He knew these through and through, and the players, who understood him thoroughly, followed him in every detail, so that even his caprices were rendered with faultless technique. But a conductor who comes before a strange orchestra and wants to take the works not in their natural way — wherein the feeling of the players will always assist him — but to distort them, has not the time, in the few rehearsals that are usually allowed him, to elaborate properly all these *ritenuti*, *accelerandi*, little *fermate*, and breath-pauses by which he hopes to make an effect; and so it may happen that some of the players follow the conductor and the others their natural feelings, and the greatest ambiguity results. It has struck me that eccentricity of this kind has been carried to further extremes in foreign tours than in our own country, apparently because the public abroad is supposed to be more easily imposed on. At least I have found in the orchestral parts abroad some markings which, had I not seen them with my own eyes, I should have thought impossible. Having often been asked by the players, before the rehearsal, whether I would adopt this or that peculiar *nuance* of one of my predecessors, I generally found it necessary to say categorically: "Ignore all markings; follow only the printed instructions as to phrasing". Since in spite of this there were misunderstandings, owing to the parts being

in many places so covered with "readings" that the original was obliterated, I often protected myself later on by taking my own copies with me.

The saddest part of the business was that the chief arena chosen for all these varieties and experiments was our glorious classical music, especially the holiest of all, that of BEETHOVEN, since BÜLOW had acquired the reputation of a master-conductor of BEETHOVEN, and his followers wanted to outbid him even there; though one would have thought that reverence — to say nothing of love — for this unique genius would have put all vain thoughts of this kind to flight.

To take only one example, how the C minor Symphony has been tampered with! Already the gigantic opening has brought into being a whole crowd of readings, notably that according to which the first five bars (with the two *fermate*) are to be taken quite slowly. Even the "spirit of BEETHOVEN" was cited to justify this misguided attempt at emendation, for which, however, not BEETHOVEN's spirit but that of his first biographer, SCHINDLER, is entirely responsible. SCHINDLER, the key to whose character, I think, is sufficiently given by the fact that after the master's death he had visiting cards printed with the title "Ami de BEETHOVEN", has told in his biography so many anecdotes whose untruth has been proved by THAYER, that we may unhesitatingly reckon among them the story that BEETHOVEN wanted the opening of the C minor symphony to be taken *andante*, and the faster tempo to come only after the second *fermata*. Is there even a moderately satisfactory explanation why BEETHOVEN, instead of specifying so extremely important a change of tempo, should have marked the passage *allegro con brio* when what he wanted was *andante*? LISZT's opinion on the point will be of interest. In the previously-mentioned concert of the Meiningen orchestra in Eisenach, where I made BÜLOW's personal acquaintance, — he took the opening of the C minor symphony, that time at least, in a brisk *allegro* — LISZT told me that the "ignorant" and furthermore "mischievous fellow" SCHINDLER turned up one fine day at MENDELSSOHN's, and tried to stuff him that BEETHOVEN wished the opening to be *andante* —

pom, pom, pom, pom. "MENDELSSOHN, who was usually so amiable," said LISZT laughingly, "got so enraged that he threw SCHINDLER out — pom, pom, pom, *pom!*"

Near the end of the first movement there is at one place a five-bar group —



Now whether we look upon the fourth bar of the second group (the pause) as a short *fermata* and the first bar of the succeeding five-bar group as the up-take — according to which there then comes another four-bar sentence — or whether we take it that the opening theme of the *allegro* occurs in the recapitulation the first time thus —



and the second time with an extra bar, thus —



however we calculate the thing mathematically, in either case the short breathless silence and the ensuing outburst of the chord of the diminished seventh become, just by their prolongation, terrific, gigantic, powerful, menacing, overwhelming,

volcanic. It is like a giant's fist rising from the earth. Will it be believed that almost everywhere I found the indescribable effect of this passage simply destroyed, either by a bar of the diminished-seventh chord or by the pause itself being *struck out*?

The most tasteless rhythmic distortions, the most absurd breath-pauses, have been calmly indulged in in order to appear interesting; the result has been, however, to turn a supreme stroke of genius into a mere piece of irregularity; *because* the thing must go as a four-bar phrase. *O sancta simplicitas!* The offenders always father their audacities on BÜLOW. I cannot believe he had so many sins so answer for¹.

Towards the end of the same movement, in the passage where the chords come rattling down like devastating masses of rock,



I found the two *sforzati* corrected to an elegant *piano*, and a delicate *diminuendo* marked before them, making the passage like an elegiac sigh.

¹ Not long ago I discovered indeed something that made me doubtful as to BÜLOW's understanding of BEETHOVEN, namely, his cadenzas to the G major concerto. Of all the delicate works of BEETHOVEN's middle period this is perhaps the most delicate. The themes are spun out of perfume and light, the treatment of them is full of chaste, refined charm; it has an atmosphere of immaculate maidenliness that suggests the perfume of lovely flowers. BÜLOW wrote for it two cadenzas — explosive, full of virtuosity, "leit-motivic", soulless, unmelodious — that have the effect of verses by JOSEF LAUFF dovetailed into a poem by GOETHE. In Paris, where unfortunately I could not prevent the performance of them, since I knew of them for the first time at the final rehearsal, a humorist asked me after the concert whether the pianist had made a mistake and interpolated cadenzas belonging to a piano concerto by TCHAIKOVSKI.

I freely admit that I have never been fully satisfied with the rendering of the second movement of this symphony under any conductor but BÜLOW. BEETHOVEN marks it *andante con moto*. The older conductors overlooked the “con moto” and played the movement *andante*; the modern ones, on the other hand, appear to see only the “con moto”, and drop into an *allegretto*, thus giving the wonderful theme



a dance-like character that is quite alien to its nature. My own conception of it, in which the *andante* is maintained while the *con moto* is regarded as the spiritual breath that unites and animates the movement, I cannot adequately express in words; I must refer to the performances I am permitted to give of the work.

I may mention a tragi-comic incident I once witnessed in this movement. After the conductor had begun in the usual *allegretto*, he played these bars —



in so slow a tempo that he had to beat each semiquaver of the triplet separately! But enough of these examples.

I need mention no names in order to point out that several conductors of importance have refused to have anything to do with these perversions of style. I may also say that my remarks refer for the most part to an epoch now somewhat removed from ours. When I published this book

in 1895, my object was to try to show how much the art of conducting had developed up to then, since the time when WAGNER had given it a new basis both by his deeds and his words. If on the one hand a decided progress could be noted, — greater competence in the orchestra, a more perfect *ensemble*, more feeling for vital phrasing than hitherto, thanks to BÜLOW and some excellent conductors who had become great under WAGNER's direct influence, — on the other hand there was imminent danger that the vanity, egoism and caprice of younger conductors should make fashionable a style in which the masterpieces of music should be merely pegs on which to hang a conductor's own personal caprices. This is all the more dangerous as an audience with little artistic education may, in its astonishment, take the arbitrary for the genuine thing, and, its healthy feeling once perverted, always hanker after these unsound piquancies, so that finally it thinks the trickiest performance the best. WAGNER's treatise combated the philistinism that suffocated every modification of tempo and therefore all vitality of phrasing in a rigid metronomism; my own book on the other hand combated the errors that had arisen through exaggeration of these modifications after the necessity for them had gradually come to be admitted. It was therefore no plagiarism of WAGNER's, as was of course asserted, but its counterpart, or, if you will, its continuation in the spirit of our own day. If WAGNER opened new paths, I believed it my duty to warn people against mistaking a senseless trampling of the grass for progress along new paths.

But when I saw that my conduct was looked upon merely as unprofessional and prompted by the desire for self-exaltation, that my right to enter into literature was denied, and that in the end, in spite of the rapid spread of my book, all I had fought for was wilfully ignored and I myself described as the worst of the tempo-rubato conductors, I consoled myself with GOETHE's fine saying, that it more becomes the good man to do the right than to be concerned whether the right is realised. So in the first place I sought by conscientious self-education to remove from my own conducting

everything that, externally and internally, might savour of false attempt to be a "genius", and laboured to become an ever more faithful interpreter of the masters by intimate comprehension of the peculiar style of each of them. I had the joy finally to succeed with what I had recognised as right. My taste must indeed have received thereby a powerful purification, which alienated me from many things I had thought significant, and drew me towards many things that I had misjudged. In the last few years I have heard very little. I sometimes see in the journals one of the younger conductors specially praised for his "simple" and "grand" readings, from which I conclude that the "tempo rubato" is not at such a premium as formerly, and that its unhealthy excrescences represent a fashion that is gradually dying out if not yet quite extinct. We know however that fashions may return, and so when a third edition of this book was called for, I felt that I ought not to shirk the trouble of a careful revision, and then send it out into the world once more.

Some demands that I made at that time on every conductor I still hold to be valid to-day, wherefore I repeat them here:

The conductor must before all things be sincere towards the work he is to produce, towards himself, and towards the public. He must not think, when he takes a score in hand, "What can I make out of this work?" but, "What has the composer wanted to say in it?"

He should know it so thoroughly that during the performance the score is merely a support for his memory, not a fetter on his thought.

If his study of a work has given him a conception of his own of it, he must reproduce this conception in its homogeneity, not cut up into pieces.

He must always bear in mind that the conductor is the most important, most responsible personality in the musical world. By good, stylistic performances he can educate the public and promote a general purification of artistic perception; by bad performances, that merely indulge his own

vanity, he can only create an atmosphere unfavourable to genuine art.

To have given a fine performance of a fine work should be his greatest triumph, and the legitimate success of the composer his own.

To this I will add the remarks of two masters who were themselves great conductors. In a letter to the music director PRAEGER of Leipzig, WEBER, after having expressed himself on the subject of indispensable modifications of tempo, goes on to say: "The beat (the tempo) must not be like a tyrannical hammer, impeding or urging on, but must be to the music what the pulse-beat is to the life of man.

"There is no slow tempo in which passages do not occur that demand a quicker motion, so as to obviate the impression of dragging.

"Conversely there is no *presto* that does not need a quiet delivery in many places, so as not to throw away the chance of expressiveness by hurrying."

He continues immediately, however:

"But from what I have here said, for heaven's sake let no singer¹ believe himself justified in adopting that lunatic way of phrasing that consists in the capricious distortion of isolated bars, and gives the hearer the same intolerably painful sensation as the sight of a juggler violently straining all his limbs. Neither the quickening nor the slowing of the tempo should ever give the impression of the spasmodic or the violent. The changes, to have a musical-poetic significance, must come in an orderly way in periods and phrases, conditioned by the varying warmth of the expression."

He concludes:

"We have in music no signs for all this. They exist only *in the sentient human soul*; if they are not there, then there is no help to be had from the metronome — which obviates only the grosser errors — nor from these extremely imperfect precepts of mine, which, considering the extent of the subject,

¹ Of course the same thing holds good of the conductor.

[Author's Note.]

I might be tempted to pursue much further, were I not warned by painful experiences how superfluous and useless they are and how liable to be misconstrued."

WAGNER also was afraid of his remarks on this point being misunderstood and thereby giving occasion for exaggerated phrasing. After having devoted to the necessity of *artistic* modifications of tempo almost the whole of his treatise on conducting and many other passages in his writings, he expresses the following opinion, in which, when we survey the post-BÜLOW period, we must admire his prescience:

"It is certainly a really valid warning against these (to me) necessary modifications in the cases I have named, that nothing could harm the works more than capricious *nuances* in phrasing and tempo, which, by opening the door to the whims of every vain and self-complacent time-beater who aims at "effect", would in time deform our classical music beyond recognition. To this, of course, no reply is possible except that our music must be in a bad way when such fears can be entertained; since it is as good as admitting that we have no belief in a power of true artistic consciousness among us, against which these caprices would at once be broken."¹

* * *

There remain some special points for me to discuss, — in the first place, conducting from memory.

This makes a great impression on the audience, but I do not place too high a value on it. In my opinion a conductor may really know a work by heart and yet fear that his memory may play him a trick, either through pardonable excitement or some other disturbing influence. In such cases it is always better to use the score; the audience is there to enjoy the work, not to admire the memory of the conductor. I recommend doing without the score only when knowledge of it is combined with such a mastery of oneself that reference

¹ See Mr. ELLIS's translation, in WAGNER's Prose Works, Vol. IV, pp. 336, 337. [Tr.]

to it is more a hindrance than a help, and the conductor, though he may read a page now and then, yet feels that to use the score throughout the whole work would be putting a needless fetter on himself. It is all a purely personal matter, however, that has nothing to do with the perfection of the performance. If the conductor is so dependent on the score that he can never take his eyes from it to look at the players, he is of course a mere time-beater, a bungler, with no pretension to the title of artist. Conducting from memory, however, that makes a parade of virtuosity is also inartistic, since it diverts attention from the work to the conductor. Now and then we see a conductor put a score on the stand *although* he conducts from memory, his object being not to attract too much attention — a proceeding that I think commendable. But I hold that it is entirely the conductor's own concern whether he will use the score or not. A good performance from the score has value; a bad one done from memory has none. For instrumental artists also, playing from memory is in my opinion a matter of quite secondary importance; it can be done by anyone who has a quick and reliable memory. But if a player has difficulty in learning by heart, it is better for him to devote his time to mastering the intellectual and technical structure of the piece and to play from a copy at the concert, than to be in continual dread of a lapse of memory and of having either to stop or to pad with something of his own, which means disfiguring the work. I have even heard BÜLOW, who had a remarkable memory, "improvising" in this way in his piano recitals. Here, as in so many other cases, it only needs someone with the courage to begin and the others will follow.

BÜLOW, in his witty way, divided conductors into those who have their heads in the score and those who have the score in their heads. I might distinguish them, perhaps rather more deeply, by means of the following antithesis — some conductors see only the notes, others see what is *behind* the notes. Then again there are conductors who destroy the unity of a work that is one and indivisible, and others who can shape the *apparently* fragmentary into a unity.

Some conductors are reproached with making too many gestures — not without reason, for the mechanical element in conducting is by no means beautiful in itself, and the black dress-coated figure with the baton-wielding arm can easily become ludicrous if the arm gesticulates wildly instead of leading the men, and the body also twists and curves in uncontrollable emotion. A pose of assumed quiet is however just as repellent. In our music there are, thank God, moments when the conductor must let himself go if he has any blood in his veins. An excess of movement is therefore always better than its opposite, since — at any rate as a rule, — it indicates temperament, without which there is no art. We should not laugh at a talented young conductor whose vehemence prevents him bridling himself, but exhort him in a friendly way to keep his body quiet, and to train himself *not to make any more movements than are necessary*. The expression of each passage will then generate an appropriately great or small motion of the baton. A complete harmony between music and gesture will indeed only come with the years; but as a general thing it may be pointed out that short, quick motions ensure greater precision than very extensive ones, since in the time taken up by the latter the strictness of the rhythm may easily be deranged.

A further question, much discussed at one time and even now and then to-day, is the relative artistic value of touring-conducting. What indeed can there be to object to if the same conductor secures excellent performances to-day in Dresden, for example, and a little while afterwards in Petersburg? A "question" arises only when the performances are less good by *reason of the touring*. If however the public the whole world over has opportunities of hearing the great violinists, pianists and singers, one cannot understand why it should be denied it to listen to the orchestral interpretations of notable conductors. There are two ways of managing this. Either the conductor travels alone, and in many cases performs with an orchestra that he does not regularly conduct, or he travels with an orchestra that is permanently under him, or at least exclusively at his disposition for the

tour in question. The latter plan appears to be preferable, on account of the perfect understanding between orchestra and conductor and the absence of the necessity for fatiguing rehearsals when once the tour has begun. It has however this disadvantage, that the greater expense of the transport and maintenance of a whole orchestra necessitates a great number of concerts — generally one every day — with numerous repetitions of the same programme, since, a great part of the day being often spent in travelling, it is impossible to rehearse new works during the tour. The absence of rehearsals indeed obviates some physical fatigue, but on the other hand intellectual lassitude seizes upon both conductor and orchestra when the same piece has to be played too often, in addition to which there is the physical exhaustion of the travelling. As varied programmes as possible, and as short railway journeys as possible, together with proper comfort not only for the conductor but for the players, are factors — not easily to be managed — to which the organisers of such tours must before all things attend, if they are to serve not merely business but art.

The conductor who tours alone must take care that adequate rehearsals are allowed him, the number of which will depend upon the quality of the orchestra, the degree of his familiarity with it, and the difficulty of the programme. A mere “getting-through” with the concert and pocketing of the fee is a sin against art, whether at home or abroad; on the other hand conductors who are above the feeling of offended *amour propre* or foolish rivalry can under this system get into closer touch with and stimulate each other, learning from each other in every way to the ultimate enriching of art. Moreover it must be recognised that the two great concert organisations in Berlin, and latterly also the Vienna Philharmonic concerts, are now in the hands of visiting conductors, and that no intelligent person will try to infer from that fact any diminution in the value of those concerts.

I have so far spoken only of conducting in the concert-room, not of that in the *theatre*. That is a chapter in itself, and unfortunately not a pleasant one. The conductor of a

small concert-society in a small town has generally at his command a fair if not a strong orchestra and a tolerably well-taught chorus, with which two factors, given much industry and some ability in the conductor, really good performances can often be given. Now and then such performances in the smaller towns, — not so-called “music-centres” — are surprisingly good. I may mention as an instance the chorus and orchestra at Chemnitz in Saxony. At the theatres in small towns, however, the great obstacle to all artistic effort is the horrible singer-proletariat, which, like so many other afflictions, is a product of this nervous, hurrying epoch of ours, when every one wants to get money and glory as quickly as possible, but scarcely considers whether he is really doing anything good. If nowadays a decent voice appears anywhere, there is not, as formerly, a long course of years devoted to its training and to the general artistic education of its fortunate possessor, but the singer takes lessons, often for not more than half a year, from the first teacher that comes to hand. Then some leading parts suitable to his range of voice are drummed into him by a chorus-master. He learns how to bring off some dazzling *tours de force*, but in every other respect sings as incorrectly and unintelligently as possible, and generally acquires no knowledge at all of what his *rôle* in the opera signifies or what the opera is all about. Afterwards he falls into the agents’ hands and is sold to the theatres, of which there are some hundreds in the German-speaking territories. So the poor devil is usually sent first of all to a little theatre, where he draws a miserable salary that is scarcely enough to live on; out of this, however, he has to pay the agent a percentage which, if not much in itself, means quite a handsome sum to the agent because of the number of theatres he provides. The agent grows fat, but art goes to ruin. Scarcely has the novice got an engagement when it is a case of “On to the stage!” At best he gets a piano-rehearsal and now and then an orchestral rehearsal, so as to have an inkling of how to find his way about. No part gets more. Often he really does not know what he has to do, and stands in

despair by the prompter's box, where he sings his notes, as far as he knows them, with awkwardly sprawling arms and legs. He meets with malicious colleagues, who have knocked about for many years on the "world-significant" boards and have no voice left, but know the ins-and-outs of the stage and make use of this knowledge to trip up the novice who has a voice, especially if a trace of talent is suspected in him that later on may be dangerous to them. For some years he wanders from one wretched stage to another, and at last, sung-out, tired out, sick of the paint, his rosy hopes deceived, he looks round for a business in which he can get employment. With women, whom passion or need has driven to the stage, it often goes still more sadly. To comparatively very few of them, who happen to be both talented and lucky, does a better lot fall. Add to this that in the small theatre orchestras there are four first violins, one contrabass, and one viola-and-a-half, — for one of the two is usually to be reckoned only as half; that the chorus numbers perhaps ten men and ten women; that the decorations and scenery are in tatters; and with material like this "Fidelio", "Frei-schütz", "Zauberflöte", "Tannhäuser" and "Lohengrin" are given — nowadays even the "Nibelungen". It is quite clear that under such conditions there can be no question of conducting *as an art*.

But even at the larger municipal theatres, where the singers are of better quality and often highly paid and the orchestra is finer, art is sometimes difficult to detect, since too often a man is at the head who has no notion of art, but uses the complicated apparatus simply to fill his own pockets. The most unscrupulous exploitation of forces is not unusual in these theatres, and the "Herr Director" can finally so arrange things for himself that he loses nothing if a member has worn himself out as the result of the excessive demands made upon him and no longer stands at the height of his capacity. The way in which the earlier theatre-agreements permitted one to be given up body and soul to incredible caprice can be estimated only by one who, like myself, has been in the sad condition to have to subscribe to such

agreements. Much has indeed been done by theatrical unions in conjunction with high-minded and intelligent theatre-directors; but much remains to be done. Is it then surprising if singers who have the melancholy certainly of losing, through a comparatively short illness or even through an obstinate indisposition, their bread for perhaps a month, if not altogether, take care of themselves and try to retain their vocal powers as long as possible? Since this cannot be done, however, if they are to do their almost daily work properly, they reserve themselves for especially important representations, e. g. *premières*, "guest"-engagements, evenings when the press attend, and so on. For the rest, however, they take things easily, often simply sing at half voice, and do their work very negligently. Indifference, that direst foe of all art-activity, has become master. What can the conductor do with a wearied, ill-humoured lot of assistants? He soon resigns himself to beating through his usual three hours and for the rest to letting the Herr Director look after his own pocket.

The relatively greatest possibility of artistic achievement exists in the richly subsidised court and other theatres, whose chief, employed by the town, is not forced to work for his pocket and in addition to worry about meeting his rent. Yet even here there are some extremely serious defects. In the first place, only in a very few towns, and even there not entirely, is it fully recognised that the supreme direction of opera should be in the hands of an artist — of a musician, in fact, with an administrative committee under him that shall have no power of veto against him in artistic matters. Then again at all theatres, the large as well as the small, *too much* is played. No theatre is in a position to give daily performances of equal value; it would need at least more than twice as many soloists, chorus and orchestra, and more than twice as many adequate rooms for rehearsal, to allow of a sufficient number of rehearsals taking place without over-fatiguing everyone. An opera that has been put aside and then revived is bound to suffer if it is not carefully and critically rehearsed afresh, especially when long intervals

elapse between these unrehearsed repetitions. The *ensemble* that has been produced by such vigilant care is imperilled when, owing to the absence of the players of one or more chief *rôles*, other singers who have studied only their own parts, and who, supposing them to have been present at the preliminary rehearsals, have been merely looking on, are put in with a cursory stage rehearsal. "Guest"-visits of foreign artists are the absolute enemies of finished, artistically rounded performances. But the so-called "Festival Performances" that are nowadays arranged by our theatres with pompous *réclame*, and to which famous singers from all parts are invited who often do not attend even the general rehearsal, are the merest absurdity. "Thrift, thrift, Horatio!"

Need there be a performance every day? This question opens up further questions, the answers to which now-a-days, when money-making is the war-cry and the box-office statement trumps, look rather utopian. Nevertheless I will try to give the answers, in spite of their uselessness. Could not the public be gradually made to see that it would be better, for the same money that is spent on the average in going to the theatre, to go less often and pay higher entrance-prices, but have thus the certainty of seeing only first-class performances, and so get more real elevation instead of often very superficial enjoyment? Fewer but better-prepared performances would then yield about the same receipts. Or, — and here indeed I touch upon the province of the apparently impossible — will courts, states and towns never comprehend that the theatre must be a place not of luxury and thoughtless amusement, but of *popular education* like the school, only in a more spiritualised sense, and at any rate of higher ethical significance than the church? Will people "above" cease to obstruct the perception that noble dramatic and musical plays — which, if the grievous concept "deficit" no longer existed, could be made accessible also to the lower classes — would perform a powerful culture-work, weaken the lower instincts and strengthen the higher, to the good of the nation that cultivates them? Germany has in many things taken a splendid lead. To emancipate the dramatic

art gradually from private interests, and tend it as an inestimably important part of the life of the people, would not this in its way just as much assure Germany's world-position as armies and navies? Is it not unpardonable that the worthiest works are rarely given, because the public has lost touch with them? But why? Simply because it hardly ever gets a chance of hearing them. In this vicious circle one evil emanates from another. Take GLUCK, for example. Now and then one of his sublime operas appears on the German stage as a stop-gap, imperfectly rehearsed, badly sung, and with worn-out decorations. At the Paris Opéra Comique "Orfeo" and "Alceste" are stock pieces. Make the experiment of giving them in Germany in the way they are given in Paris, and the public will go to them. Does not the positively unheard-of success of the "Midsummer-Night's Dream", so finely produced at the "Neues Theater" in Berlin, prove that many "old Schmöker" — as we piously speak of our master-literature — only need to be given properly for an interest to be created in them? It is just the same with the classical music-drama; also with some notable new works, which after a few performances have been taken off in terror, because the press by zealously asserting that they lacked interest kept people away. This would soon have been remedied if the directors had only had the courage to keep the works on in spite of a temporary falling-off in the receipts, and so restored the confidence of the public. Instead of which there was a sigh of "never mind", and the old humdrum *répertoire* of routine went on and goes on for better or for worse. In this way CORNELIUS's "Barber of Bagdad" slumbered for decades before it was revived. GOETZ's "Taming of the Shrew" passed out of remembrance, until it reappeared in our own day in Berlin, this time to be joyfully welcomed; and VERDI's delightful "Falstaff" is still as good as forgotten. The "Trumpeter"¹, however, or "Cavalleria" and similar stuff endure and draw full houses. *Mundus*

¹ The reference is to the comic opera "Der Trompeter von Säckingen" by VICTOR NESSLER (1841—1890), founded on the mock-heroic poem of the same name by J. V. VON SCHEFFEL. [Tr.]

vult Schundus, jested LISZT with bitter irony; and our theatres take the greatest pains to avoid bettering this state of affairs¹.

Conviction, conviction — a theatrical director should prove he possesses this. He can only do so, however, if he is independent of daily receipts and press scribblers, and can fully and freely fulfil his task of educating the public in the noblest sense of the word, — the public, that does indeed too easily incline towards the bad and the superficial, but still has enough freshness and *naïveté* to receive the good willingly if it is only offered to it. To this end the director must in the first place be indeed an artist, who thinks of something more than receipts and criticisms; and in the next place a *character*, who not only knows what he wants, but means to fight for it and to get it.

But an end to these dreams.

As for the special function of the conductor in the theatre, WAGNER says very truly that just as the right comprehension of the *melos* of a piece of music suggests the right tempo for it, so the right way of conducting an opera presupposes the true comprehension of the dramatic situation on the part of the conductor. As a matter of fact he must before all things have the stage in his eye. This will give him, consistently with due fidelity to the markings of the composer, the criterion as to whether he shall take the tempo faster or slower, how he shall modify it, and where he shall expand or contract the volume of orchestral tone. He will not allow himself to draw a melody out at length when the phrasing should be free and animated; he will not beat out a fast tempo, effective as this may be from the merely musical point of view, where the dramatic development goes more slowly; nor will he elaborate orchestral *nuances* that drown the singers or divert people's attention from the events on the stage.

Of special importance is his relation to the singers. Only a significant individuality can create a significant performance, and this only when the individuality can express itself in the performance fully and without hindrance. Drill counts

¹) The epigram would have no point in a translation. "Schund" means literally "rubbish", "offal". [Tr.]

for nothing; it may be necessary with the less endowed singers, who for better or for worse are just put into their proper places in the frame of the whole. Admirable artists however *must* have, within this frame, room for the free play of their own conceptions, — indeed, they must be held to the necessity of thinking out their parts for themselves. At the piano rehearsals the conductor should in the first place impress it strongly on the singers that they must learn their parts correctly down to the smallest detail, which is the only way to attain precise co-operation between orchestra and stage, and so secure the fundamental condition of any good performance — a faultless *ensemble*. When, after thorough study, individual liberties begin to be taken by the singers, he should see that these do not contradict the spirit of the whole work — which he must have completely assimilated, — or the character of the particular passage. The artistic perception of the conductor and of the singers may be measured by the degree in which they secure the fine medium between rigid correctness and living freedom.

Once more I must cite WEBER, with whose almost forgotten writings I strongly advise every artist to make himself acquainted. In them will be found artistic intuitions of such delicacy as to make doubly painful to us the early death of this splendid master and the unhappy circumstances that hindered his full development. He writes in the above-mentioned letter to PRAEGER:

“It is the individuality of the singer that actually and unconsciously colours each *rôle*. A man with a nimble, flexible voice and one with a big quality of tone will render the same *rôle* in quite different ways, — the first certainly in several degrees more animatedly than the second; and yet the composer can be satisfied with both in so far as they have rightly comprehended and reproduced the gradations of passion he has indicated, each according to his measure. But it is the conductor’s business to see that the singer does not go too far and merely do what seems to him at first sight apt.” WEBER thus convincingly lays it down that the worth of an opera conductor is not, as many think, to be

estimated by how far he is able to comply slavishly with the whims of the singers, — which is routine but not art.

Further, the conductor should not allow himself to be tempted by convenience to make inartistic cuts, and when he conducts foreign operas must see to the improvement of the translations, which are generally very bad in the matters of phraseology, sense and musical declamation; for nothing corrupts the artistic feeling of the singers more — to say nothing of the harm done to the whole performance, — than when they are forced to memorise the conventional doggerel of opera-translations, which is mostly quite unfit for music. It is essential, then, that the conductor should understand at any rate French and Italian at least well enough to be able to make what improvements are necessary.

On the whole the work of the opera conductor is less independent because it relies on and is supported by more factors than that of the concert conductor, who alone is responsible for the whole of his own performance.

Anyone in whom the dramatic sense predominates will be the better opera conductor; the better concert conductor on the other hand will be one whose perceptions are mostly purely musical. Anyone in whom both gifts exist in equal measure will be equally successful in both styles.

I must mention one more defect which, in the light of pure reason and of all that WAGNER has said and done, seems really ludicrous, but which, notwithstanding, is rooted in our theatres so deeply as to be almost beyond the possibility of extirpation, namely the complete separation of the stage management, the machinist's department and the musical direction. If a new opera is given on which the theatre does not mind spending a little, a commission is sent to a scene-painter, — often to a foreign firm of repute, — along with a text-book, while the stage manager arranges *his* book and the conductor rehearses the singers. When the scenery comes to be set up, the stage-manager generally finds that he will have to alter *his* business, since a good deal that he had planned will not fit in with that particular scenery. Then when the conductor comes in with singers and orchestra it

is clear that, e. g., such and such a chorus cannot do its musical work properly if it stands with its back to the audience, that such and such an actor requires a lot of room for his action in a rather long *ritornello*, while he has been allowed only about four square feet; and so on. Then bad temper, a scramble, and the best face possible put on it, which however only leads to further mischief; and at the last rehearsal but one the end of it is that they would all, if they could, gladly begin again from the beginning. But the day of production is fixed, the booking guaranteed, the mere idea of a postponement therefore monstrous; so let it go as best it can. This system of work often results in some good stories; for example, at three large theatres I have known Brynhilde to wake up in quite another stage-setting than the one she went to sleep in. Years had elapsed between the staging of the "Valkyrie" and of "Siegfried". The scenery had been ordered of different painters, who had not come to an understanding as to the identity of the scenes in the two works. The proposal, however, simply to use in "Siegfried" the scenery of the "Valkyrie" was vetoed by the chief machinist, on the grounds that for technical reasons this scenery could not be put in after the fire-transformation. With the careless remark "The public does not notice" they went on to the order of the day, and the enchanted Brynhilde was spirited away each time to another sleeping-place.

Since however an operatic performance can be artistic only when all the factors work together, the proper distribution of the labour is this: — When the stage management and the music are not in the hands of the same man — which is not much to be recommended, since the conductor, when he is in the orchestra, cannot possibly attend to every detail of the stage picture — then stage manager and conductor, *before* the rehearsals begin, must come to a perfect understanding between themselves as to how the work is to be done. *Both* must be clear and of one mind as to the atmosphere of the opera, the action, the scenic pictures, the tempi, and the dynamic effects, so that later on at the rehearsals only trifling changes may be necessary. Only *after*

this preliminary work should the scenic artist and the machinist receive from stage manager and conductor their precise orders, compliance with which, however, does not mean the paralysis of their own imagination, which can work more freely and fruitfully within the artistic boundaries prescribed by the work in question than outside them.

For this understanding between stage manager and conductor two things are necessary. In the first place the conductor must have a knowledge of, an eye for, and an interest in the stage, and not merely bury himself in his orchestra to the ignoring of everything else; in the second place the stage manager must be a man of musical perception and musical *education*, who is just as conversant with the score as the conductor is. In my opinion no conductor should be appointed to a theatre who has not shown that he can stage an opera, and no stage manager who cannot rehearse the musical part of the work. It is perfectly nonsensical that sometimes people should be made operatic stage managers who are not at all musical. The result may be made evident by some experiences of my own. I once asked one of these people to call a piano rehearsal for the eight Valkyries. At the rehearsal there appeared also another lady for whom there was nothing to do. Between the stage manager and myself the following dialogue ensued:

Myself: Why have you summoned Frau N. to this rehearsal?

Stage Manager: You asked me to call the Valkyries.

Myself: Well, which Valkyrie does Frau N. take?

Stage Manager: Why, Fricka!

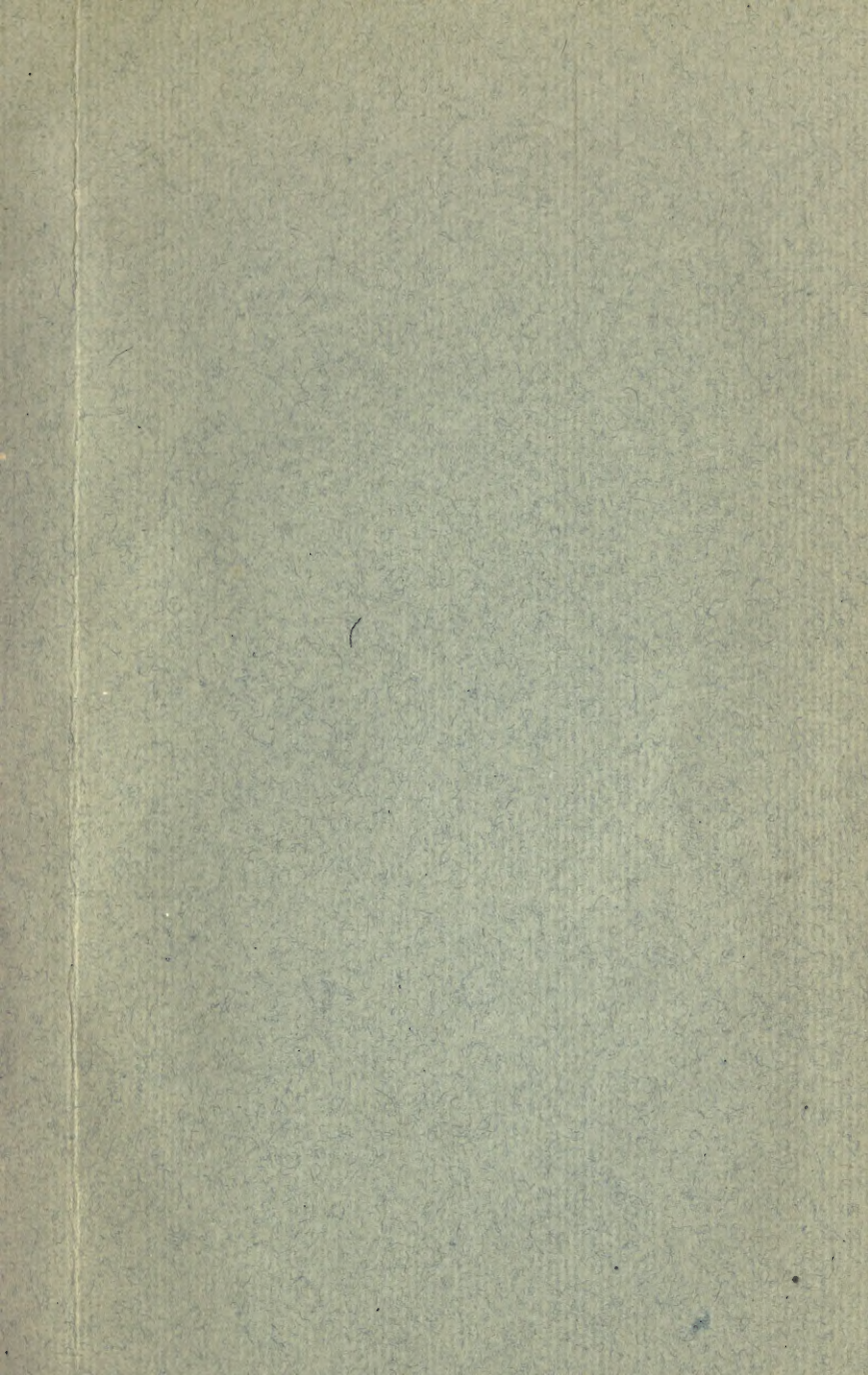
Some days later the same manager posted up this notice — “Orchestral rehearsal for ‘Siegfried’, for principals and *chorus*”. Everyone knows there is no chorus in “Siegfried”.

During the preparation of BERLIOZ’s “Benvenuto Cellini” I saw unloaded before the theatre a number of specimens of that statuette of Perseus that is necessary in the third Act (Cellini’s studio). I asked the stage manager why he had ordered so many, since only one is required; he replied that they were counting on further performances, and Cellini would have to smash one of these statuettes each time.

Then, to my horror, I realised that the good man thought Cellini had to smash the model, instead of the mould out of which the statue itself comes. Only by energetic representations in higher quarters could I prevent what would have been an indelible blot on our reputations. In most cases, however, when I aimed at the removal or at least the diminishing of obvious absurdities, I was politely told that my place was in the orchestra and that I need not worry myself about anything else. Notwithstanding this, however, they never gave me sufficient power as regards the orchestra to prevent the engagement of incompetent but favoured players.

For these and many other reasons I look upon the fourteen years I spent in the theatre as a time of uselessly squandered labour, forcible suppression of my capabilities, and — a few isolated bright spots excepted — vain struggles to get even one step nearer the ideal. I cannot recall it without bitterness.

Finally, one word more on the art of conducting itself. More and more I have come to think that what decides the worth of conducting is the degree of suggestive power that the conductor can exercise over the performers. At the rehearsals he is mostly nothing more than a workman, who schools the men under him so conscientiously and precisely that each of them knows his place and what he has to do there; he first becomes an artist when the moment comes for the production of the work. Not even the most assiduous rehearsing, so necessary a pre-requisite as this is, can so stimulate the capacities of the players as the force of imagination of the conductor. It is not the transference of his personal will, but the mysterious act of creation that called the work itself into being takes place again in him, and, transcending the narrow limits of reproduction, he becomes a new-creator, a self-creator. The more however his personality disappears so as to get quite behind the personality that created the work, — to identify itself, indeed, with this — the greater will his performance be.



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